

***"NO GUM, NO FOOD, NO DRINKS, NO EXCEPTIONS!"***

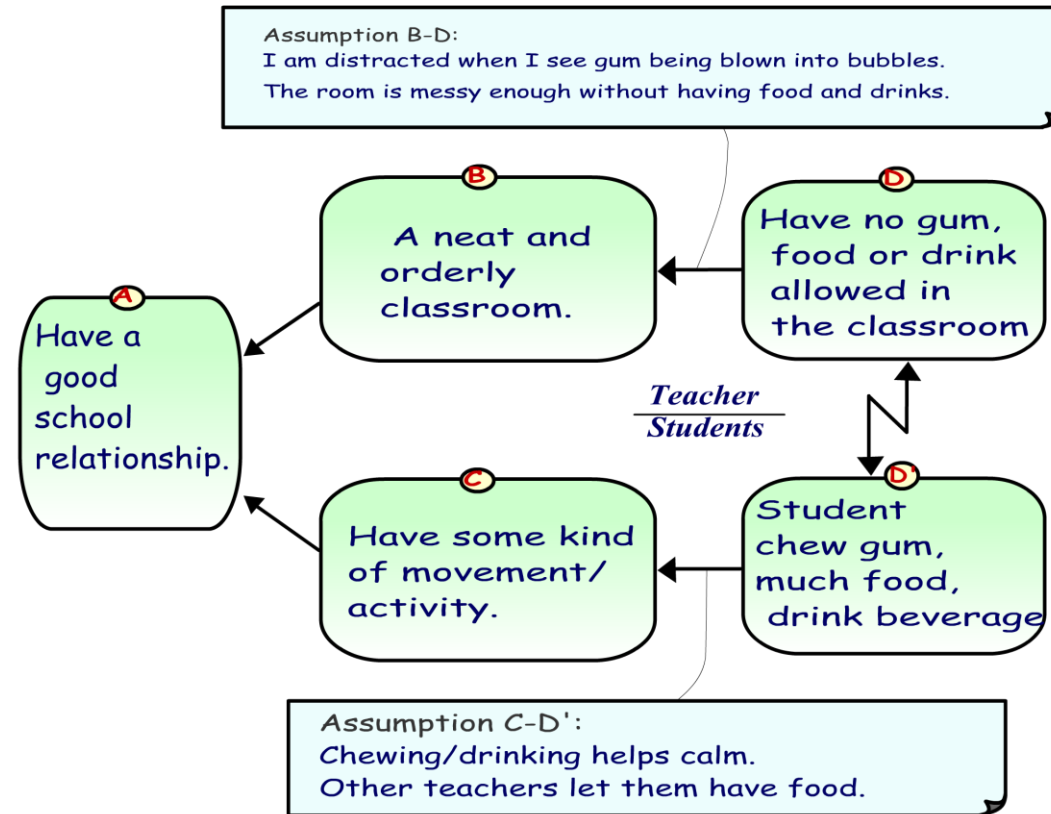
Two years ago, my school (Lake Stevens Middle School, Lake Stevens, WA) was renovated. Everything was replaced--desks, walls, carpets, ceilings, etc.

The school looked so great that I decided I needed to have some new classroom rules that would help keep the facility clean. My rules were: NO GUM, NO FOOD, NO DRINKS, NO EXCEPTIONS! With such explicit rules, I was sure there would be no problems keeping everything clean.

Wrong! I was constantly having to tell students to get rid of the gum and food and to clean messes left by spilled food and drinks. The students didn't appear to care about the rules.

At the end of the school year, I attended a TOC seminar and learned a more effective way to resolve the ongoing conflict I was having with my students. As the next school year began, I established new classroom rules by using a TOC tool, the cloud.

*The food/drink/gum cloud I presented to my class read:*



After slowly reading this definition of the problem and the underlying assumptions that led to the problem, I stopped and waited.

Almost immediately, the students started making suggestions on how to break the cloud. I think the kids could really see that I was looking at the problem from their perspective. Ideas were flying around the room like pigs in a tornado! After lots of discussion, the students found a win/win way to break the cloud: "Allow us to have food, gum, etc. and if any mess occurs or any bubbles are blown, then nobody is allowed to have food, gum etc. for one month. And if, after the one month food ban is over and there is another infraction, then there will be a two month food ban."

I liked their solution, but told the students the penalty was harsher than one I would have mandated. I thought instead a one week ban would be adequate. Although the cloud was broken on my side, I felt that I could accept these conditions. Six months after this cloud was written with my students, I still haven't had a single problem with food. The students are self-monitoring the food rule. If any trash is seen on the floor, each student hurries to clean the mess regardless of who created it.

The whole cloud session with my students took less than 30 minutes.

If I had created this rule without the students' input, I doubt the students would have acted any different than before.